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THE HEBREW WISDOM,—THE BOOK OF JOB.

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Of the several classifications of the Hebrew Wisdom literature the one which probably admits of the easiest, if not the most satisfactory treatment, may be substantially exhibited as follows:

I. The Hebrew Wisdom as exhibited in the inspired books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and many of the Psalms. This is the so-called classical period.

II. The Hebrew Wisdom as exhibited in the post-canonical and uninspired books of Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, and the Prayer of Manasseh. This is the so-called post-classical period.

In the study of Hebrew Wisdom, or philosophy, as distinguished from the Old Testament Wisdom, or philosophy, there is no reason why the apocryphal books should be excluded from the classification.

I. THE CLASSICAL PERIOD.

The contents of this period may be briefly presented under the following analysis:

1. Wisdom, or pious reflection, in the form of dramatic dialogue—including

(1) The Book of Job; in the form of epic drama. From the fact that this book is here placed, no inference is to be drawn as to its supposed age. All that is here required is that the book be regarded as written within the canonical period.*

(2) The Song of Solomon and 45th Psalm—lyrical productions.

2. Wisdom in the form of the philosophic monologue—including

(1) Many of the Psalms.

(2) Ecclesiastes.

3. Wisdom in the form of the proverb—the Book of Proverbs.

* The uniform use by the author of the book of the name Jehovah seems to indicate that the book was written by a Hebrew, and at a time when that name had already come into common use in its distinctive sense among the covenant people; but at what time cannot be determined. The fact that other names are uniformly put into the mouths of the *dramatis personae* is in harmony with the other fact that the scene is laid outside of the sphere of the covenant people both as to their theology and their civilization. It is God in his relation to mankind generally that is presented, though this God is identified by the writer with Jehovah. The thought of the book is distinctively "Hebrew" only in so far as it is the thought of the writer. How far this is the case we may never know until we have learned to what extent the characters of the book were real persons. These considerations, when elaborated somewhat, seem to render precarious any guess as to the age of the book based on internal evidence.

This classification is based wholly on the literary form of the several writings. An alternative analysis ignores the literary form, and is based on the phases of the general subject presented. In this case we should have

I. Divine wisdom, as exhibited in the creation, preservation, and government of the world and of the affairs of men. Under this head is to be considered the Hebrew view of the usual questions of theodicy, especially as presented in the Books of Job, Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms.

II. Human wisdom, as exhibited in the fear of the Lord and in various ethical and practical maxims, based mainly on the writer's own experience as recorded in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

THE BOOK OF JOB.

1. *The question of Inspiration.* It must be observed at the outset that we are by no means to regard all that is said by Job and his friends as altogether right and approved of God. See expressly to the contrary XXXVIII., 2; XLII., 7. The opinions of the several speakers on the questions arising during the progress of the debate are recorded by divine authority, but considered in themselves merely they are entitled to no more weight than other human opinions. They are valuable chiefly as conveying to us the uninspired views of ancient Orientals on the great questions involved in the discussion. Whatever may have been the purpose, or motive, of the author of the Book of Job, Ezra, or whoever the later editor was, saw something in it which, under divine guidance, induced him to incorporate it into the canon. The only thought in the mind of the original writer may have been a purely historical, or poetic, or philosophical, one; but the thought in the mind of the later editor, or aggregate of editors called the Jewish church of the early post-exilic period, was more than this. We should not in every case restrict our inquiry to the question, What did the original writer of a given book, or section, mean? He may have intended simply to spend a while in holy meditation, without having any ulterior object in view, as may have been the case with David when he wrote the 23d Psalm; or to record a touching incident, without appreciating in the least its permanent importance, as may have been the case with the writer of the Book of Ruth; or to write a nuptial poem in honor of some real or imaginary, some grand or obscure, occasion; or to speculate in dramatic and poetic form on the mystery involved in human life, as may have been the case with the writers of the Books of Job and Ecclesiastes. But the intention of the Holy Spirit went beyond all this, whether the human writer or

speaker were actually inspired by Him or not. What he said or wrote became inspired, and thereby endorsed, as a matter of record, though it may or may not have been originally inspired as a matter of sentiment. So the Book of Job, as a whole, has a value vastly above that which may attach to it as an expression of ancient oriental opinion on the questions involved. It is the word of God, a part of his revealed will, conveying to the church in all ages some of the most important truths, and an intellectual and spiritual culture, which are not presented with the same sustained dignity, beauty, and power, in any part of the Old Testament.*

2. *The Basal Thought.* (1) The scene is laid, in the first place, in the invisible world. Job is represented as being the subject of a conversation between Satan and Jehovah. Satan, in harmony with his name as the Adversary, or Accuser, prefers the charge of selfishness against Job. "Does Job fear God for naught?" Any one would serve God just as well and faithfully as Job does, if he were paid as well for it as Job is. He is a very rich and very happy man. It is easy enough to be good when all your temptations are in that direction. Jehovah is represented as denying this charge against his servant Job; and in order that the greater shame of defeat may accrue to Satan and the greater glory to himself and his servant Job, he says, Try him and see; do any thing to him, however severe; only, spare his life. This then is the basal thought of the book: The possibility of disinterested service; or, The possibility of faithful service induced by nothing but love. Doubtless Satan, unknown to Job, watched with keen interest the effect of his terrible experiments upon him. Not often are the gates so far ajar that we may see what is going on or hear what is being talked about in the spirit world; but we may oftener be the subject of observation or of conversation than we are aware.

(2) But the scene of the drama is changed from the invisible to the visible world. Satan and Jehovah disappear from observation. The dramatis personæ are Job and his friends. The scene is in Arabia at the desolated home of Job—his property all gone, his children all dead, even his wife, with lost integrity, speaking as one of the foolish women, his friends turned into accusers, himself afflicted from head to foot with a loathsome disease, and his bed an ash heap. Job the per-

* Ruskin, in his third lecture on Architecture and Painting, says that "the whole Book of Job appears to have been chiefly written and placed in the inspired volume in order to show the value of natural history and its power on the human heart." This is the shrewd and by no means valueless statement of an artist, illustrating, however, the important principle that what one sees in the Bible, as elsewhere, depends largely on the kind of glasses through which one looks. Ruskin says several other things in this third lecture suggestive, and therefore valuable, even to the Bible-student.

fect man and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil! The basal thought now is, on the human side of the drama, Why do the innocent suffer?

(3) These two basal thoughts, the one on the invisible side and the other on the human or visible, may be united in the simple statement, The mystery of suffering. The answers are

1st. Jehovah's: To prove to their defamers, whether visible or invisible, the possibility of disinterested love and service. Thereby great glory accrues to Jehovah and a great vindication and reward to the sufferers. This solution restricts the case to the innocent.

2d. Job's: He cannot answer, but simply affirms his innocence, and wonders at the mystery.

3d. Job's friends': They answer substantially by denying that the innocent ever suffer. Only the wicked suffer, and simply as a matter of inevitable retribution which must be inflicted this side of the grave. It does not fall within the scope of this brief article to enter into the details of view expressed by the three friends and Elihu.

The third answer corresponds with the Mosaic doctrine of retribution, in so far as the latter taught that disobedience must be followed by punishment in this life, and in so far as it failed to emphasize that disobedience in this life may be followed by punishment mainly in the future life. As disobedience implied punishment, so punishment implied disobedience; and all suffering was punishment.

The second answer represents a spirit of dissatisfaction with the current doctrine of retribution, not because it did not contain a great truth, but because it did not contain the whole truth. For one class of sufferings it furnished no explanation. This remark holds true whether the Book of Job be regarded as an ante- or post-Mosaic production. One of the earliest religious instincts of man, or rather, one that soonest manifests itself, is to associate as cause and effect sin and suffering in this present life. Even the heathen have always been accustomed to say: "We have sinned; therefore the gods are angry with us; therefore this evil has come upon us." Or looking at the calamity, or evil, first: "It argues that we have sinned against the gods, and this in turn argues that they are angry with us." If you sin you shall be punished in this life. This was not only the Mosaic doctrine of retribution; it had always been, and is yet, the instinctive doctrine of the human heart. The very anticipation of punishment is punishment. This is one important sense in which the doctrine is always strictly true, no matter when the punishment is actually inflicted. Moses emphasized this form of the doctrine, not only because of the truth in it, but because a sound judgment as well as divine guidance

enabled him to know that it was the way whereby he could most effectively accomplish the tuition of the Israelites—especially in their national capacity. But obviously the common experience and religious consciousness of the Semite, whether Israelite or not, would at least cause him to suspect that the common doctrine of retribution does not include all sufferings—that there are some sufferings which are not to be regarded as punishments of individual sins.

The first answer classifies, or explains, these sufferings, at least so far as the nature of the case involved admits. Some non-retributive sufferings are disciplinary. The one guiltless of any specific sin may be caused to suffer for the purpose of discipline, just as a fruit-tree already healthy may be pruned to make it more fruitful or of a larger growth. But not so in Job's case. The suffering of Job, and of all whom he represents, is not disciplinary. It is what may be called illustrative suffering; or suffering for the purpose of object lesson; or, in other words still, for the purpose of making evident a truth the mere statement of which in abstract terms would not be believed, even if it were understood. The abstract truth in this case is, The possibility of disinterested love and service of Jehovah. To simply affirm the possibility of it to the accuser, whether in the visible or the invisible world, and to actually illustrate the truth of it in the case of a Job, are two very different things, the latter of which, of course, is far more convincing, and therefore more humiliating, to the party accusing.

In this view of the matter, the Book of Job may easily be translated into the life of many a suffering Christian, he himself becoming the hero of the new version. He has lost much, or he has suffered much, in his seeming interests or in his person. He would like to know why. May he not read, at least between the lines, these words of Jehovah: "I wish to make an illustration of you. Every once and a while it is said that no one serves me disinterestedly and unselfishly. I say you do. But I wish to prove it to the accuser. Will you submit?" Nothing is said to him about reward, nor does he read it between the lines. But he submits.

Job was a real person—many real persons, indeed; and the book so called is the record of their experience. Many a good man has prospered, and then lost all, including perhaps even his good name. Why? There the answer is.

Such, it seems to me, is the primary lesson of the Book of Job. Of course other important truths are involved in this one, and are developed in the course of the discussion. No better summary of them can be given than that of Dr. Conant, whose words I here vent-

ure to quote. Not only in specific passages, but by the general trend of its thought, the Book of Job teaches

1. "That the apparently arbitrary distribution of the good and evil of this life is not the result of chance or caprice. God, the creator and judge of all, the infinitely wise, holy, just, and good, presides over and controls the affairs of earth. His providential care extends to all his creatures. He has the power to restrain or chastise wrong, and avenge suffering innocence ; and this power he uses when and how he will.

2. "That the government of the world belongs of right to him who created it ; whose infinite justice can do no wrong ; whose perfect wisdom and love devise only what is best ; whose omniscience cannot err in the choice of means ; who is infinite in power, and does all his pleasure.

3. "That to know this is enough for man ; and that more than this he cannot know. God can impart to him no more ; since omniscience alone can comprehend the purposes and plans of the Infinite.

4. "That man's true position is implicit trust in the infinitely Wise, Just and Good, and submission to his will. That here alone the finite comes into harmony with the Infinite, and finds true peace ; for if it refuses to trust until it can comprehend, it must be in eternal discord with God and with itself."